Lack of Playgrounds Cause of Increase in Juvenile Crimes

95 Per Cent. of the City's Children Use the Streets for Their Play, Which the Law Calls a Crime---Give the Youngsters a Chance

THE social centre committee of the People's Institute has been making a careful study of street play by children in the hope of giving the children a better chance and dissociating their pastimes from crime. In a report by Edward M. Barrows, soon to be submitted to the committee, the investigator makes some interesting statements.

Play is the way of life to the child, says Mr. Barrows. It is his means of growth, his motive for study and work, his greatest asset. New York city has made of play the child's pitfall, his vestibule to crime, his title to be considered an intruder and a public nuisance. Child crime in New York is built on play—wholesome, educational play, which the law treats as crime and which street conditions gradually pervert until innocent play becomes moral crime.

Crime is increasing in all parts of America. Juvenile crime is increasing more rapidly than adult crime. It is true that juvenile crime as shown in statistics is rather a statutory or legal fact than a spiritual fact. In New York city most child crime is not crime at all in a moral or spiritual sense. But this report will show that the crime of children, which begins as a purely legal fact, becomes, through normal evolution under street conditions, a moral evil and results in criminal types and criminal gangs.

Child crime begins with the attempt to play on streets in violation of law and in forbidden places under conditions of trespassing. The first arrest is normally a punishment for the attempt to play and to play in ways which are intrinsically good.

This condition presses on the child life of all the tenement districts of New York city. It is a uniformly operating cause which results in a fairly uniform method of resistance on the part of the children. Not only are the statutory crimes of fighting and stealing regarded as play by the children, but the more innocent kinds of play, like baseball, are in law regarded as crimes and are so punished. This is not, on the one hand, a defect of child character, nor on the other hand a mere stupidity of law, but is a real condition, inherent in the fact that the street with its traffic and the street front with its stores and windows are the only playground of 95 per cent. or more of the city's children.

The result is a fundamental schism between the child community and the adult community. The child community is a nuisance. The adult community is a tyrant. Neither is to blame. Our laws, our court procedure and our probation system, imperfect though they be, are not to blame. The blame rests with the city, which has not provided play space and which does not intelligently use even the little play space that is provided. Juvenile crime is a play problem not only in the sense that play is an alternative to crime—a cure for crime; but in a more specific sense, namely, in the streets of New York, under present conditions, play is crime and crime is play.

What is street play really like? Is it essentially good or essentially bad? If street play were transferred and carried out in exactly the same way in the open country, would it be regarded as educational or demoralizing, as social or anti-social? Children tend to develop play leadership which, with a little adult encouragement and guidance, will be found more useful than any kind of play supervision. This means that our playgrounds can be multiplied in usefulness and that the effective play area of New York city can be largely increased by the allotting of streets which are little used by traffic to be used by the children for play, with the minimum of adult guidance and police supervision.

Twelve thousand children are arrested annually in New York. These are not exceptional children and they are not a special problem. Rather they are typical children. They are mere exhibits drawn from the mass of those children who live in the congested neighborhoods.

This fact looms large in the whole child problem. The 12,000 children arrested annually in New York are but a small proportion of the children who have done the same things and have not been caught. These children are not sub-normal and they come from homes which are typical of whole enormous population districts. They are arrested for the only thing a child can do on the street and they have no place but the street in which to do anything. These children represent the child population of half or more of the tenement districts of New York city. Though they are physically and morally normal at the start, they do tend to become at least morally abnormal as the years of their childhood go by.

Public opinion classes gambling as a vice and a crime ranking with theft and sexual immorality. Yet the tenement streets of New York are infested with adult and juvenile gamblers, who gamble usually through shooting crap or pitching pennies. Street gambling is hardly less common than baseball or any of the other street games. The unwritten law of the city streets has sanctioned gambling for many child generations, until gambling has lost all moral significance to the children of New York. The law treats crap shooting as being identical in terms both of punishment and of why the punishment is given with chalk games or ring-around-the-rosy or kick-the-can. The arrests for gambling and for chalk games alike are treated as cases of street obstruction.

But strangely enough one offence is particularly singled out in law to be prohibited on the streets. This offence is baseball. Baseball is no sin, and the children know it. They merely know that they will be arrested if they play baseball. They know that if they are going to play ball they must send out pickets to announce the coming of the policeman before he gets there.

Baseball and the cooperative evasion of a stupid law on the part of children leads up to the question of gangs.

The innocent group of child offences has been described. The second, or vicious group, are the many organized games which have been developed under street conditions and which involve acts which as a rule the children themselves know to be immoral, though the group standards, or gang standard., allow them.

An example of this type of child crime is the widely popular sport of gang stealing. Gang stealing is recognized as a sport and game by unknown thousands of children in New York. It would have been so recognized by the elders but for the fact that in our dealing with juvenile crime we have hitherto studied the overt acts rather than the children's reasons for committing these acts. Just as we do not analyze the child's motive for playing baseball, on the streets, though we arrest him for it, so we do not recognize the motives of the child thief when in an elaborate and traditional organized game he steals groceries, baseballs, doorknobs or street lamps. How many of the male readers of this report can remember when they were boys how they stole fruit from their neighbors or when they went to college how they pilfered signs and doorknobs and souvenirs in a spirit of hilarity?

Gang stealing in many parts of New York has come to have a definite form of organization. A band of boys, from three to six or seven in number, will go from tenement to tenement on Saturday evenings, taking orders from the housewives for fruits, vegetables, groceries, light hardware and clothing, just as though they were delivery clerks. When they think they have a sufficient number of orders they go out on the street and by a series of organized raids secure the goods which the housewives have ordered. These goods are sold on a regularly established scale of prices, which in most parts of the city is arbitrary, with no relation to the market value of the stolen articles. After the boys have their money they retire to their "hang-out," where the money is divided into equal parts and the possessors shoot "craps" until one of them has it all. This boy divides the winnings into two parts, one of which he spends in treating the other members of the gang. The other half he is permitted to keep and spend for himself.

This is a regularly organized form of amusement, which has existed to the writer's personal knowledge for a decade or more on the middle West Side. As far as the boys themselves are concerned it is a game and nothing more. The crimes committed are incidental to the game. The elements the boys are striving for are the dramatic adventure in obtaining stolen goods, the excitement of gambling, which to them is no crime, and the physical joys of the soda water, cigarettes, motion picture shows, &c., which follow the game. These boys start out to seek adventure, excitement and a "treat." Unguided and irresponsible and with a tradition of lawlessness based upon the hostile indifference of their elders, they have gone after their ends without regard to consequences, with the result that before their game is over they will have obtained money under false pretences, committed larceny and gambled, for any one of which acts they are criminally liable.

Their first game of chance—a street game of craps.

Passing from this example, in which we see the methods of crime utilized for the purposes of play, we next come to the degradation of legitimate, health giving games under the exigencies of street play into the class of crime breeding games. The national game of baseball is perhaps the chiefest of these games. Aside from the fact that this game is itself specifically forbidden on the streets it is the direct cause in hundreds of cases of assault, obstruction, destruction of property and even of petty larceny. The surroundings of the game, not its nature, bring about this condition. When two juvenile nines attempt to settle the question of supremacy in a crowded street flanked by high tenements trouble invariably follows. Such games are common in the tenement districts.

The petty larceny element in these games occurs through the fact that the boys are seldom able to go clear through a full game without losing one or two balls, and, being poor, they have worked out systematic methods of stealing new ones. The theft in this case may be directly traced to the lack of adequate space in which to play a normal game of ball.

Gang fighting, another common and serious offence, is a product of the complex gang organization, which is the basis of all boy life in the streets of New York. It has its sources either in gang rivalry or in the infliction of a wrong by one gang upon another, which results in a long series of retaliatory fights, sometimes extending through many months. From being simply physical contests between gang and gang these fights often become neighborhood feuds, in which small boys are maimed, and on rare occasions killed outright, windows are broken and all kinds of neighborhood outrages are perpetrated.

There is a great distinction between these organized gang fights and the smaller misunderstandings which result in fights between two small boys. Gang fights are part of the traditional play life of the New York boys. Except among the older boys they are carried out in the spirit of play, and the theft, destruction of property, and mayhem which accompany them are regarded as incidental. The fights are very distorted manifestations of the same spirit of rivalry of which baseball or football or the more primitive tug-of-war are less destructive expressions.

When we trace back to their sources even the fights for revenge we generally find a play motive there also. Two years ago the small boys on West Fiftieth street and West Fifty-third street near Eleventh avenue were celebrating election night with bonfires on their respective streets. The Fiftieth street boys had more material than the Fifty-third street boys. When the Fifty-third street boys ran out of material they raided Fiftieth street, extinguished all the bonfires, routed the celebrants, and triumphantly carried the bonfire material to their own street. This was the beginning of a feud which lasted over a year between the denizens of the two streets, during which time a score of boys were jailed, a number seriously maimed, and hundreds of dollars worth of property destroyed. Yet, despite the number of arrests on the charge of fighting, disorderly conduct and destruction of property, the feud itself continued unabated until a compromise was arrived at by the boy leaders themselves.

In New York city child play is peculiarly a nuisance. The streets are inadequate even for business purposes, and business must go on even though life itself withers. New York is not intelligently laid out for human use. The leisure even of adults is unprovided for. What is leisure to the adult is the beginning and end of life to the child. So the child finds himself in New York city a misunderstood, persecuted and objectionable stranger in a strange land.

As a result of the investigations by Mr. Barrows, the People's Institute has undertaken a neighborhood work which will correlate and broaden the various recreation activities now going on in the middle West Side. A social centre has been opened in School 17, on West Forty-seventh street, on the initiative of the local school board. The People's Institute has taken executive charge of the work. About this centre there will be focussed a neighborhood movement, which will work in De Witt Clinton playground, on the West Fiftieth street pier, in the public libraries and on the streets. Mr. Clinton S. Childs will be the neighborhood secretary. It is under his direction that School 63 has been developed so brilliantly.

It is planned to build this work upon the neighborhood groups as now organized—both the child and adult groups. The neighborhood group will be encouraged to establish and enforce its own codes. There will be as little imported work as possible. There will be very little pedagogical work, at least in the beginning. The activities will be made so interesting that they can really compete with the commercial amusements and gang avocations of the neighborhood as it now exists.

The work in School 17 will be carried out in cooperation with the recreation centre and the after school athletic centre in that building, and will be supervised for the Board of Education by Dr. Edward T. Stitt, the director of evening recreation centres.

There is needed for one year's work a minimum sum of $3,500. Of this sum $2,750 has been raised. A larger budget would make possible a much more rapid development of the work.

CITY'S 330,000 UNEMPLOYED PRESENT ACUTE PROBLEM--

Immediate Relief Needed by Some—System of Providing Work for All That Has Been Successful in Germany, Switzerland and Elsewhere

By DR. W. D. P. BLISS,
Secretary of Religious Citizenship League and Former Commissioner of the United States on Unemployment in Europe.

YESTERDAY'S snowstorm partially and but temporarily solved the problem of the city's vast army of unemployed. Early in the morning Street Cleaning Commissioner John T. Fetherston put 4,000 men at work cleaning the streets. These men will be kept busy for a short time and are but a small percentage of the vast number of starving and freezing out of work.

What New York city should not do upon the subject of unemployment is to appoint a commission to meet the emergency. Later on, or at any time, a commission might well be appointed to investigate the facts and the causes of the present emergency, and make recommendations for the permanent solving of the problem; but such a commission will not meet the present need.

With hundreds of thousands out of work, the families dependent upon them cannot be fed with reports of commissions. We need at once not a commission but a committee with power to act. This power to act, however, is needed more than a committee, and this power might well be delegated to some present department of the city government.

If a committee be appointed, it should be composed of experts familiar with existing conditions and of members equally representing employers' and employees' associations. This would to some extent obviate the suspicion against such committees on the part of labor. The committee should be composed of the best citizens, representing both employer and employee. In Berlin, among the members of the Unemployment Committee in a recent year were found six city councillors, two aldermen, three members of the Advisory Council, two professors, one of whom was a member of the Royal Council; three judges in trade disputes, a member of the Prussian Supreme Council and of the Royal Statistical Bureau, a chief burgomaster emeritus, a councillor of the Admiralty and consulting counsel of the Imperial Marine Office, a director of the Statistical Bureau of Berlin, the Spanish Consul-General, a director of the General Electric Company, the publisher of the Berlin *Tageblatt*, a member of the Privy Council and Counsel in the Imperial Ministry of the Interior, and a director in the Imperial Statistical Office.

But besides this impressive list there was an equal number of representatives of the organized trades. Such a committee, if it could be created in New York, could and would accomplish things.

The second step that should be taken is the appointment of an adequate staff of men and women who should analyze each application for relief. Until the various classes of unemployed are differentiated nothing practical in any large way can be done for any class. Years ago John Burns said:

"Till the tramp, thief and ne'er-do-well, however pitiable he may be, is dealt with distinctly from the genuine worker, no permanent benefit will result to any of them. The gentleman who gets up to look for work at midday and prays that he may not find it is undeserving of pity. I have seen the most genuine and honest men at meetings mixed up with the laziest and most drunken scoundrels."

It is not those who first apply for relief who need it most. The Associated Charities in this city find that three-fourths of the families they relieve have never applied for help themselves; application has been made for them through some relative or interested party. It is the self-respecting unemployed, who will not apply for charity, that are often those most in need. "Divide et impera" is the motto that must be written over the pathway to success in the unemployment problem.

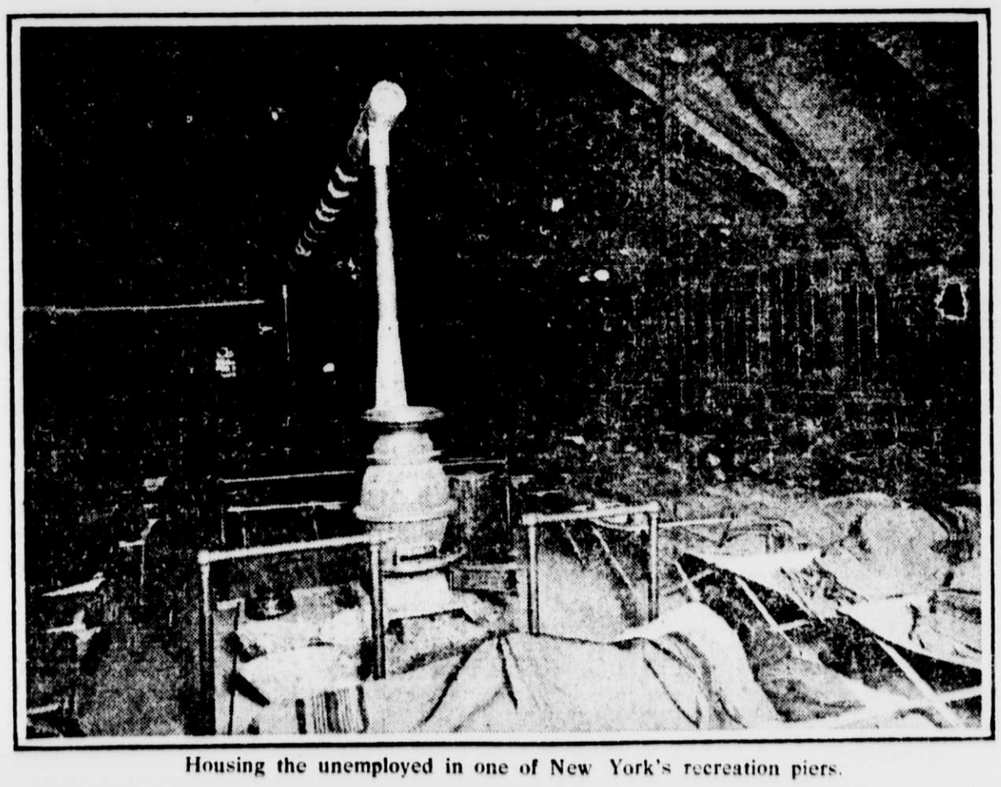
Nevertheless, while these classes must be differentiated and different classes need very different treatment, all must be provided for. This does not mean coddling or paternalism. On the unemployment question, sternness is often the truest charity. It must be remembered that if a man will not work, neither shall he eat. It must also, however, be remembered that if a man does not eat, neither can he work.

Because a man is unemployed and inefficient, it does not follow that he is to blame. He may be the subject of an exhausted heredity, or the result of bad environment. When tired women bend over washtubs in our laundries for sixteen hours two or three days a week their children are very likely to be born tired and incapable of protracted work. Because a man is incapable, therefore, it does not follow that he has only himself to blame.

It is so with the immoral. A brave New York bishop once said that he believed that if he had to work twelve hours a day at persistent, monotonous, mechanical toil he would take to drink. If this could be true of a bishop, what must it be of a man living, not in an episcopal palace, but in a tenement, with perhaps two or three families in a room? In other words, those who study relief must study causes, and the competent and the incompetent, the willing to work and the unwilling to work, must be treated in very different ways. Society must look the whole problem in the face and not blink at any portion of it.

Generally speaking, the unemployed may be divided into four main classes: first, the temporarily unemployed; second, the more or less permanently unemployed; third, the unemployable who are willing to work, and fourth, the unemployed who are capable but more or less unwilling to work, including the vagrants and the incorrigible and vicious.

Considering these classes separately, the temporarily unemployed must be aided by immediate measures. Of the 330,000 unemployed men in this city who are reported by the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, 150,000, or nearly one-half, are said to be day laborers. Seventy thousand more are in the building trades. Of this number a very large proportion will be able to find work before the close of the next eight weeks, and almost all of them within three months. But this does not help matters now.



Housing the unemployed in one of New York's recreation piers.

The family cannot be left to starve because in two or three months the head of the family may get work. When he gets it, it will usually be on small pay. What are we to do for this needy class during these eight weeks?

Whatever is done must be done at once. It ought to be done this week. If it is not, the sin will be on the people of this city, and especially those responsible for its religions, its morals and its charities.

As far as possible work should be given to this class in the ordinary city activities by our public institutions. New York city is dirty. Rightly organized, the unemployed could make it clean. A large number ought to be put to work immediately in this direction. New streets which are needed could be opened. It has been suggested that low land adjoining certain city properties could be filled in. Some propose that land absorbed by the gas should be regained for the city.

For women and for some of the men that work done by the unemployed should not undercut or take away work from those already in employment. Great care should be taken, also, that the unemployed in other cities or other neighborhoods should not be drawn to New York by the temporary relief work. The starting of relief work in San Francisco and Los Angeles recently drew into the city a great many from outlying neighborhoods who could get better pay from the city than they could get by working in the country. For New York city to make such a result possible would be the height of folly.

The unemployed should be paid for their work, and paid, if possible, at trade union rates. The city should not organize the scab men against the union men, but it should give only part time work, so that men who have a chance of getting work in the ordinary channels should not be tempted to leave it for municipal activities. Some think that the unemployed should only clothing works might be started to provide clothing for the workers in need in this respect. Some of the clothing workshops to-day not used might be temporarily leased by the city and some of the unemployed put to work in them.

Great care should be taken, however, be put to work on alternate days, with the earnest advice to them to occupy the intervening days in looking for work.

Those who are somewhat permanently unemployed we will speak of later when we come to the more permanent relief measures.

For the unemployable, for whatever reason, the aged, the mentally defective, the diseased, the epileptic, &c., immediate provision should be made, just as far as possible, by the Department of Charities, as almshouse cases. New buildings might be rented for this purpose. Friends and relatives should be asked, and, if possible, made, to help or support such cases as far as may be practicable. The various classes should be treated according to their needs in various institutions.

Coming now to those who will not work, these should be firmly dealt with. Both St. Paul and the modern socialist are agreed that he who will not work shall not eat. Modern charity does not go to the extreme of St. Paul and the socialist. We allow the man to eat, but we compel him to work for his keep. Men of this class should be immediately committed to the workhouse until proper institutions can be developed for them, such as farm colonies, inebriate colonies, &c., of which we speak in the second portion of this article.

The weak vagrant should not, however, be confounded either with the "sturdy beggar" or with the thoroughly vicious. Too often our workhouses are schools of vice with compulsory attendance. Such education should not be a part of our public school system, and especially should the young not be mingled with the old and the vicious in such workhouses.

Industrial farm colonies have been proved to be to a large extent a cure for evils of this class, and even temporary measures should be shaped with this end in view. Elmira Reformatory takes the partly vicious, and by building them up physically and teaching them industrial occupations and then obtaining for them positions where they can work, saves year after year 80 per cent. of those who leave the reformatory.

Coming now to the question of what should be done more permanently, the first aim should be to absorb in the ordinary activities as many of the unemployed as possible. This can only be done by employment bureaus, or rather by a system of employment bureaus in various portions of the State, with agencies or representatives in every town or even hamlet. The creation of a single employment bureau, or even of two or three, in the State will do little good.

What is needed is a thorough organization of the State, and especially of the smaller places in connection with the large, in order to find work for every man and woman so far as is possible. This is the German system. In the German Empire, in all the cities and towns, and in almost all the hamlets, there is at least an agency or an agent to whom any man in need of work or any employer in need of a worker can apply. Each bureau, each agent, is put in touch with the whole system, so that arriving even in a small town a worker can know in what direction to look for work and, what is equally important, in what direction not to look.

At the very least, it saves time, and at the best, it puts the workless in the right channel for finding work and the employer in the right channel for finding workers. This completeness of the system is one of the marked features of the success of the German labor bureaus. They are not commercial; they are free. They are not all alike. Some of them are private bureaus; some are managed by the trade unions, some by philanthropists, some by churches, most of them are municipal; but they are all connected, and the Government oversees the whole system, leaving out the fraudulent and inefficient, but handing the effective into one whole.

The Government neither manages nor meets the cost of the local bureau. That is managed and financed by the local committee. The Government simply finances and controls the means of intercommunication binding them together. If New York State would establish a few central free employment bureaus in the larger cities, with perhaps three or four in New York city, with these all the smaller non-commercial bureaus could be connected.

More than this could be done. The churches could take up the problem, and every church could have a committee upon unemployment, which, connected with the State bureaus, could create a network of information upon this subject through the State. The United States Government warns the farmer and the sailor of changes in the weather, and spends money freely to provide against risks by storm. Why should not the Government equally warn the employer and the laborer against the equally threatening dangers of lack of work? If such an employment system were created through the State work could be found for all for whom work exists.

Especially should such a system contribute to the placing of labor in the country. This would be the special result of having a network through all the State. What is needed is to get every man into the country for whom work there can be found. This has been notably the result in Bavaria, where the bureaus have made a specialty of placing labor upon the soil.

Coming now to the inefficient and incompetent and the unemployable, we need for this class labor colonies, or industrial farms, which, however, should not be penal. To associate those for any reason incapacitated with the vicious and those unwilling to work insults the unfortunate and does harm to all.

Germany has thirty labor colonies where the unfortunates who cannot get work find at least shelter, where they are urged and led to do such work as they can, and where, therefore, they largely at least earn their own livelihood. Switzerland is a smaller country, but Switzerland has improved upon the German system by introducing various kinds of colonies for various classes of the incapacitated. We should develop these as soon as possible.

Beginnings in industrial colonies have been made in Cleveland, Ohio, and in Kansas. We need them in New York State. Even here beginnings are made and are being proposed for wayward boys and in connection with our State institutions. But these should be developed and added to by farms which would at least cost the State less than it now pays for the unfortunate and where many of the latter could be trained and encouraged to do work which, under proper organization and direction, could be made in part to pay the expenses of the institution and thus relieve every State institution of expense, and remove from the State the disgrace and the problem of the tramp and the vagrant.

For the more or less vicious, colonies should also be started, but to these men and women could be committed and compelled to work. These, too, should be, if possible, for various classes of the vicious. The drunkard and the crook need different treatment. Above all should the young and those confirmed in vice and evil be separated